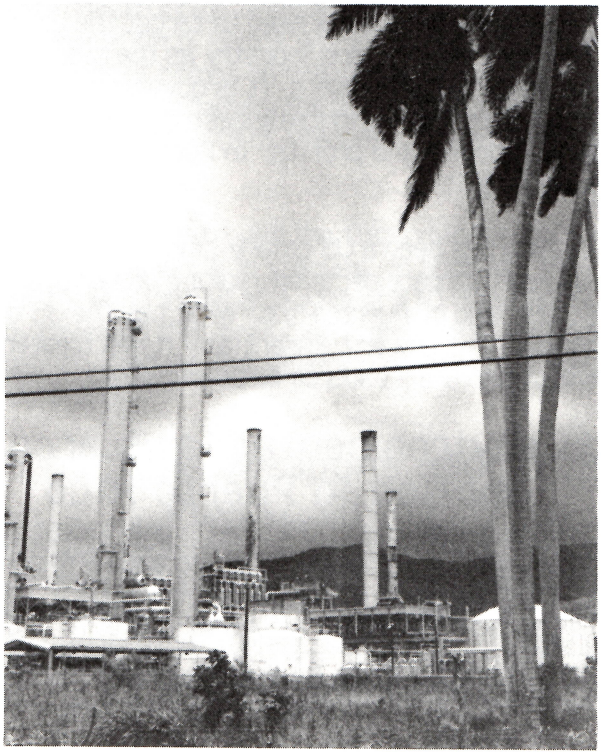
US Colonialism Destroys Puerto Rico's Environment



SOME FACTS:

* American Metals Company (AMAX) bought 37,000 acres of Puerto Rico's mineral rich interior with plans to strip mine.

* US Navy bombing practice and "war games" destroyed the fishing industry on the small island of Vieques, Puerto Rico.

* US logging companies plan to cut down one-third of the trees of Puerto Rico's national rain forest, El Yunque.

As we try to protect our world from environmental destruction, it is important to understand the causes of that destruction and exactly who is responsible. Our individual efforts to recycle are essential, but insufficient. The case of Puerto Rico underlines the the need to target the government, particularly the military, and industry as the biggest and worst environmental offenders. It is government and industry that are willing to short-sightedly destroy our world to maintain their power and profits. In Puerto Rico, they are getting away with it.

Puerto Rico has been a US colony since 1898. This means that the US has ultimate decision-making power over the people and the land of Puerto Rico. What has the US government done with this power? Essentially it has treated Puerto Rico as one big natural resource to be exploited.

US environmental laws aren't applied in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico is now one of the most highly industrialized nations in the world. Formerly a fishing and farming economy, it became a haven for US corporations in the 1950s. Under IRS Law 936, US corporations in Puerto Rico don't pay any taxes. And since 90% of the industry is owned by US companies, they reap tremendous profits.

Moreover, highly polluting US pharmaceutical, electronic, and petrochemical industries in Puerto Rico are not limited by environmental restrictions. As a result, the island is now being destroyed by factories spewing out sulphur dioxide that pollutes the land, air, and water. In fact, the entire city of Christiana was destroyed by mercury chrome poisoning discharged by US-owned industrial plants.

Industrialization has resulted in tremendous profits for US corporations based in Puerto Rico. According to US Congressional Budget Office April 1990 figures, there is a 77.5% rate of return for US pharmaceutical companies in Puerto Rico. Compare that to an 18.7% rate of return for US-based production, which is taxed by the government and restricted by US environmental laws. The advantages in Puerto Rico are clear.

US Navy destroys fishing industry in Vieques

The US military has also contributed to Puerto Rico's environmental destruction. Perhaps the worst example of this is Vieques, Puerto Rico. Since World War II, the US Navy has dropped thousands of bombs on Vieques. Claiming that Vieques is essential for US war games, the Navy has defied massive public protests by residents of Vieques who demand that the US Navy get out.

The bombing has destroyed the fishing industry, formerly the main source of income in Vieques. In addition, the US rents Vieques out to NATO allies at a rate of $10,000 per hour. A 1990 study revealed that pollution from Roosevelt Roads, the US Navy base on Vieques, has severely polluted the water around that island.

US nuclear weapons stored in Puerto Rico?

An additional environmental threat to Puerto Rico is posed by the US storage of nuclear weapons there. Although the US government refuses to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons in Puerto Rico, a 1984 report by the Puerto Rican Bar Association confirmed that all of the necessary facilities for the storage of nuclear weopons are in place in Puerto Rico.

There is widespread opposition to the US destruction of Puerto Rico. Much of this opposition comes from the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, which is fighting to regain control of the Puerto Rican nation. The independence movement understands that opposition to environmental destruction can only succeed when US colonialism is ended in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican people decide the future of their nation.

Save El Yunque rain forest!

One of the most successful pro-environment actions in Puerto Rico was in opposition to planned logging of trees in El Yunque rain forest. Currently a US national park, 1986 headlines in Puerto Rico's newspapers revealed that the US

Park Service had entered into negotiations with US logging companies to cut down one-third of El Yunque. Realizing the ecological impact, and based on the strong national significance El Yunque has for Puerto Ricans, a powerful movement in opposition to the logging sprang up. Demonstrations, pickets, and even the bombing of US military installations by the armed clandestine group *Los Macheteros*, forced the park service to cancel plans to sell Puerto Rico's "national heritage" and ravage the rain forest.

But, right now, AMAX still owns 37,000 acres of the mineral rich interior, which contains huge deposits of copper, molibidium, and other essential minerals. And, as you read this leaflet, it's probable that the US Navy is dropping bombs on Vieques.

Since the military and companies that are destroying Puerto Rico come from this country, our opposition can have a big impact. Here are some things you can do to end US colonialism and stop the destruction of Puerto Rico's environment:

1. Set up a slide show with friends at your church or school on US colonialism in Puerto Rico and environmental destruction.
2. Help distribute this leaflet.
3. Join us to petition to get the US military and corporations out of Puerto Rico.
4. Write to President Bush, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC to demand that the US military get out of Puerto Rico.

For more information, please contact:
the **Free Puerto Rico Committee:**
Chicago
Box 295, 2520 N. Lincoln
Chicago, IL 60614
(312) 278-6706
New York
POB 2512, Cadman Plaza
Brooklyn, NY 11202-0052
(212) 243-0202
San Francisco
3543 18th St. #17
San Francisco, CA 94110